EVALUATION OF WHEEL-TRANS SERVICE FOR THE
DISABLED PHASE I REPORT: COMMENTS

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I.B.I GROUP - PHASE I REPORT

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EVALUATION OF WHEEL-TRANS SERVICE FOR THE DISABLED

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At its December 11, 1981 meeting, the Wheel-Trans Advisory Committee requested the Toronto Transit Commission to submit comments on the recommendations contained in the "Evaluation of Wheel-Trans Service for the Disabled Phase I Report" prepared by the I.B.I. Group.

In this regard, Commission staff have reviewed the aforementioned report giving particular attention to the recommendations contained therein. In general, the report has addressed a number of areas where efficiency or quality of service could be improved. The report, however, tends to provide only the positive aspects in support of the recommendations without considering the possible negative effects that could arise. Recognizing this, our critique will attempt to balance the two.

The following is a summary of our comments on each recommendation, extracts of which are contained herewith.

1. Because of the difficulty in scheduling guaranteed medical trips, it is recommended that the medical trip guarantee be eliminated.

It is our opinion that the medical trip guarantee is supported by the majority of the disabled community as a necessary and desired service. It is recognized that the provision of this service may result in some loss of efficiency in the scheduling process. However, there is no indication that this reduction in efficiency is sufficient to warrant elimination of the medical trip guarantee.

2. The advance call-in time for reservation trips should be reduced from seven days to four days.

The consultant, in support of this recommendation, implies that the reduced call in time will result in fewer cancellations. The cancellation rate in November 1981 for reservation trips was approximately 8% compared to 20% for subscription and 25% for pre-book service. This suggests that even if the reduction in the advance call-in time from 7 to 4 days had a major effect on the cancellation rate for reservation trips, there would be only minimal effect on the overall cancellation rate. We are, therefore, not convinced that the cancellation rate is a legitimate reason to reduce the advance call-in time.

The possible adverse effects should also be considered. Previously, we had many complaints concerning late call-backs to confirm trips. In an effort to improve the quality of the service in this area " first come, first served" scheduling and 24 hour call-back was introduced to allow sufficient time for alternate arrangements to be made should a trip request be refused. This procedure has been accepted as an important improvement in service quality. The reduction of the advance call-in time from 7 to 4 days could reduce the quality of the service by again delaying the confirmation procedure and reducing the time available to make alternate arrangements.

3. The distinction between subscription and pre-book trips is mainly administrative and it is recommended that the pre-booked trips be eliminated as a separate category and that persons wishing to use the system on a regular basis at least once a week be treated as subscription trips.

The Commission does not agree that the difference between subscription and pre-book service is mainly administrative. These services provide for two distinct needs in the disabled community. Subscription service accommodates those persons requiring the same service during peak periods on a daily basis. The service is provided at a reduced monthly rate. The consistency of the service required allows the development of high productivity schedules. Pre-book service accommodates those persons requiring less frequent weekly trips at a variety of times. Combining of the two services would provide no visible improvement for the user and could result in a number of administrative problems as well as a reduction in service quality for subscription riders.

4. Consideration should be given to selling a pass to all subscription users. Those who use the service less than four weekdays per week could have a reduced cost pass, specifically for Wheel-Trans, with the cost of the monthly pass equal to the number of monthly rides times the applicable one-way fare.

The service is already highly subsidized and we do not feel that reduced fares for less frequent users of the system are justified. In addition, administration of such a a system would be expensive.

5. The forms used for trip reservation and cancellation should be changed to include only the basic information that is requested and to be more compatible with the trip scheduling and preparation of driver run sheets.

Commission and contractor's staff are currently reviewing the design of the reservation slip, cancellation slip and the drivers' waybills.

6. Trip cancellation forms for subscription (and pre-booked) trips, once noted on the card file, should go directly to the scheduler so that the Master Schedule can be altered to provide for trip reservation requests.

This recommendation reflects an area previously under review by the Commission. The procedure as described has been implemented.

7. It is recommended that the T.T.C. send both changes and revised drivers' run sheets to All-Way for subscription trips.

We concur with this recommendation. Changes to subscription runs were previously given to the contractor verbally. Commission staff are now confirming such changes in writing.

8. Because of the difficulty in reaching some people to confirm trip reservations, it is recommended that the onus be on the passenger to call-back for confirmation of a trip request. This call-back period should be 48 hours after the trip request was made, to allow sufficient time for scheduling.

The implementation of this recommendation would improve the efficiency of the contractor's operation by reducing the amount of time the contractor's staff spends confirming trips. However, we are not sure what the effect of such a change would be on the user, i.e. some frustration could be experienced by Wheel-Trans riders should they be unable to get through on the confirmation line during peak call-in periods. The Advisory Committee is in the best position to determine the merits of this recommendation.

9. Driver training procedures should be expanded to include some medical awareness training, so that they can properly identify the appropriate course of action if a medical incident occurs on the vehicle; the preparation of a manual outlining systems and procedures to drivers; the use of some standard films which increase drivers' sensitivity to the problems of the handicapped; and a procedure for testing/training new drivers on their knowledge of the street system. This program might include, for example, taking new drivers to common points of trip making activity, to show them where the entrances are, and other characteristics of the facilities.

The present policy requires the driver to call for professional medical assistance immediately. We believe there should be no change in this policy. We have no objection to medical awareness training in conjunction with the above policy, however, we are concerned that a little knowledge may be a dangerous thing.

The possible use of sensitivity films in the driver training will be discussed with the contractor. The remaining points in this recommendation have previously been discussed with the contractor.

10. To accommodate those wishing to travel to adjacent communities, it is recommended that discussions be held with the operators of adjacent systems to determine the feasibility of transferring passengers or extending services between communities on a regular basis. We understand that the Long Range Planning Committee is currently considering this matter. It is also recommended that reciprocity of registration be organized between Wheel-Trans and systems operating in other cities throughout Canada, so that disabled visitors have access to the services.

This recommendation is under review by the Long Range Planning Sub-Committee and a report is expected in the near future.

11. Obtaining a separate radio channel dedicated to the Wheel-Trans service is highly desirable, since increased radio traffic is bound to occur as the service expands. Support for the All-Way application by the Toronto Transit Commission and/or the Ministry of Transportation and Communications might assist in its processing.

We understand the application by All-Way Transportation Services for a separate radio channel for Wheel-Trans has been denied on the grounds of insufficient use of the current channel which is shared with the All-Way School Bus service. Although the Commission will certainly support the All-Way application, it is suggested that a communication from the Advisory Committee would be more appropriate.

12. When the schedule of an individual vehicle experiences delay and the driver informs the despatcher of the delay, passengers should be called on a routine basis to inform them of the problem and to advise them of the revised pick-up time.

This recommendation is already an established Wheel-Trans policy. The contractor has been requested to remind his staff of the obligation to fulfill this requirement.

13. When planning vehicle additions to the fleet, consideration should be given to a smaller vehicle which is more manoeuvrable, more comfortable and has lower operating cost.

The Commission is presently developing specifications for a suitable vehicle for the Wheel-Trans service. The appropriate size and capacity for such a vehicle will be an important consideration.

14. A more secure wheelchair tie-down which does not damage the wheelchair should be investigated.

Commission staff are continually reviewing and evaluating wheelchair tie-down devices. The system currently in use on Wheel-Trans vehicles is an approved system which has the major advantage of accommodating the many non-standard conveyances utilized by the disabled community.

15. The interior heating of the Mighty Mite should be improved by the addition of a heater closer to the rear of the vehicle.

Complaints regarding cold vehicles are very infrequent which would indicate that this is not a major concern. We will continue to monitor this area and recommend changes should the need arise.

This report is submitted for the information and consideration of the Wheel-Trans Advisory Committee.

Transportation Department
6-106-42
January 13, 1982